# YALI Voices Podcast: Self-described ‘troublemaker’ is a trailblazer

Amalkher Djibrine Souleymane at the 2015 Mandela Washington Fellowship Presidential Summit (Courtesy photo)

“I’ve always been, I’m sorry, but a troublemaker,” Amalkher Djibrine Souleymane tells the State Department’s Todd Haskell in a YALI Voices podcast. In his introduction, Haskell acknowledges that Souleymane is “never one to back down from a fight.”

Growing up in Chad, Souleymane was encouraged to pursue an education by her family even at a young age, enrolling at age 6 as the youngest student in her class. But her teacher had other priorities than educating his students. Souleymane’s confrontation with him would be only her first challenge against authority.

She also had a big impact as a women studying business and accounting before starting her own construction company. She didn’t necessarily like being a trailblazer and refused to let other women take the easy path. “It’s like you didn’t use the potential in you. You can do more than that,” she said.

Souleymane discusses how her experience as a 2015 Mandela Washington Fellow empowered her while exposing her to the similarities and differences between her country and those of the other Africans she studied with in New Orleans.

She tells young people that you don’t need tremendous resources to make changes “because you are everything.”

“If you have an NGO, if you have an association of young people, of women, don’t always wait for projects to be funded or waiting for money to start doing things,” she said. “You can do many things without money.”

Listen to the full podcast to learn how her drive to fight and courage to be a pioneer has only grown stronger. For Souleymane, it seems nothing is impossible!

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“YALI Voices Podcast:
Amalkher Djibrine Souleymane”

TODD HASKELL: Welcome, young African leaders. This is the YALI Voices podcast, a place to share some of the best stories from the Young African Leaders Initiative Network. My name is Todd Haskell, and I’m so glad you joined us today. Don’t forget to subscribe to the podcast and visit yali.state.gov to stay up-to-date on all things YALI.
Today I’m going to have a conversation with Amalkher Djibrine. Amalkher is an inspiring young leader and education advocate from Chad. And we talked about her experience and the Mandela Washington Fellowship, and how it has influenced her life.

She’s never one to back down from a fight. And Amalkher has worked tirelessly to promote gender equality for women and advancement through education. Let’s jump right into my interview with Amalkher Djibrine.

Well, good morning, Djibrine. It’s really a pleasure to be here with you this morning. We’re just thrilled that you’ve been able to come back to the United States.

I can tell you that I began working on the Mandela Washington Fellowship three years ago. And the last three years I would say a large part of my life has been dedicated to working on this program. I remember the early meetings, and what we envisaged about the program. And it’s so terrific to see the fellows like you who are already making a difference in your countries and to see the fruits of this program come forward.

I know that you participated in the 2015 Mandela Washington Fellowship. You were here, and you went back to Chad last summer. Can you tell me a little bit about how the program has had an impact on you, and the work that you’ve been doing in Chad?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: OK, thank you very much. It’s really a pleasure being here with you too. I’ve been of course a Fellow from last year. And I went through a lot of opportunities like networking and having people who are doing the same thing, all that.

So when I went back, I think the program had a lot of impact on me, first of all regarding the networking. Because you have a huge number of people, the same age as you, and doing great things in different countries. And you can charge, you can exchange about what you’re doing.

TODD HASKELL: You mean networking with the other Fellows in the other countries.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Yeah, networking with the other Fellows. I think it’s a unique opportunity that you cannot find any way in other ways. So what I’m doing in Chad exactly is I’m working in youth and woman empowerment organization called Nirvana. And I’m also representing the Women International League for Peace and Freedom, a 100-years-old organization.

And the impact that the program had on me, is like if you want to make a change, you don’t have to keep speaking about this change. You have to take an action and maybe people can follow you. Because in the world we have followers and we have people who would take initiative and bring other people on the group. And the thing that I did before I came back here is we have the National Council of Young People of Chad. And this council is the most important thing representing the whole young people of Chad.

But the problem is the leadership is so bad that the last three years, we didn’t see anything coming out of this organization. And I tried to approach them and tell them that they have to call all of us in a national assembly, and to tell us what they did the last three years, because nothing is coming out as far as we’re concerned. And we had some problems, because they know what they did and they don’t want to come out and expose themselves.

Later, I decided to have meeting with young people who are sharing the same idea as I do. And every day we have more people coming to our group, the people who are not OK with the leadership of the National Council. And then we call them, they came, and we asked them. And the answer are not really interesting.

So we said we want you to resign because that’s not a good thing, and we need another team because young people are not something easy in Chad, because we are more than 80% of the population. We don’t have old people, sorry.

TODD HASKELL: (Laughs) No offense taken.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: So it's more than 80% of the population. And we have a lot of expectation that we cannot go through in this kind of leadership.
And this problem went to the Ministry of Youth. The Ministry of Youth first of all didn't recognize our committee as complaining a group. And then later on, the program went through to the prime minister and went to the presidency. And they call us in the meeting and they're OK with what we are saying because the other group is not able to answer our questions. And they said I think this group is right, and do you have to go to the Congress because they're asking for the Congress.
And just before I came here, they're preparing for the Congress for people to go through. And I think this is a huge impact of self-determination and self-confidence, because it cannot just go through something so risky if you are not self-confident about what you are doing.

TODD HASKELL: And you used the term there, risky. Can you talk a little bit about the obstacles and the kind of risk that you took, you think, in doing this?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Yeah, the first risk is the team itself, the former team. The president of the team is a guy that I can call a little bit dangerous because he's moving around with a gun and just intimidating people.

TODD HASKELL: Sounds a little bit dangerous.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: It's very dangerous, not a little bit. And the problem that he had is the culture is also playing a big role in that. Because if it was a guy doing all that against him, he won't spare him.
But it was a lady though. He's like, I don't know what to do with this lady. Can you please help me move her out of the committee?

TODD HASKELL: Do you think being a woman in this situation allowed you an advantage or allowed you a certain level of protection?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Yes, of course. I think if I were a guy, it's going to be completely different. And even the guy won't spare me. Won't give me a chance to go that far, because he know what to do with me. But because I'm a woman, the culture is like a man, they don't fight with woman, they don't talk much, that much, with women. And he's like, she is in the middle and I don't know what to do with her.
And people took advantage of that. And the team is growing every day, because they know we are going to the end of the fight. And today I can say it was a fantastic experience, because for the first time in Chad, we had more than 1,000 young people gathered in the same room for their own future. And that was historical. And we had some media and newspapers and all that thing.
And every day people are talking about the same fight. Young people's fight of Chad? It's always the same. Where are you now? And people are calling and sending emails, like, where are you now? I want to join! Where are you now? And I think we went really very fast and very sure of what we are doing, because we are right.
And we did it. It's not yet the end, but I think because the highest authority gave the instruction to the Ministry of Youth to bring us to the National Congress of Youth. I think that's a little bit sexist.

TODD HASKELL: It's a great story. And what's your vision, do you think, for the National Youth

Council? What do you want with it when we get to the end? And if you take over?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: First of all, what we want to do is to have a very, very wonderful team. And what I mean by wonderful is a team capable of taking into consideration all the complaining of young people, because we have a lot of problems like unemployment. We have some young people go to drugs and all that. Because of that, our main leader in Chad is the National Youth Council. It's like a political position, but it represent the whole young people of country.
And the voice of this organization is very well heard by the government. But the problem that we had is the leader didn't consider the importance of the organization he's leading. And it's like other association and it's fine, but if we had a good leader who is every day reminding the government and all the stakeholders about the problem of young people, and the solution that we can propose, and what we really want, and as we know these voices are heard, we can have an output of all that and the situation it can change.

TODD HASKELL: Without the experience of the Mandela Washington Fellowship, do you think you would have done all this?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: I will maybe come back before the program. I've always been, I'm sorry, but a troublemaker. Every time I'm the first one who is complaining about something that's going wrong within the community, within the young people, and all that. So I think the program helped me a lot by giving me self-confidence and giving me an idea about the power and the energy of the team.
And also an idea about one doesn't have to sit behind and talk about, yeah, we need change. We are poor. We don't have this, we don't have that. Instead of going through the problem inside, and try to make this smallest action that you can, and other people can just follow what you are doing. So I think the program help a lot by giving this self-confidence and motivation to make positive impacts every time by the smallest action that you can bring.

TODD HASKELL: That's good. But you say you were always a troublemaker. I know you grew up near Lake Chad, and later on you moved into the capital. Can you tell me a little bit about that and some of the trouble you made when you were a young person?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: First of all, the first year of my school I had some elder sisters at home. And at that time, it's not even easy to bring daughters, girls to French schools. Because most of the parents bring their daughters to Arabic schools. And that's a culture anyways.

TODD HASKELL: To Arabic schools, not French schools.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Because we have two official languages. It depends also on the religion, but that's how they do. But our mother, she's like, I'm going to bring my daughters to French school because she saw the difference between the outcome of the two languages later on. On the career and all that thing.
So she brought my elder sister there. And every day they're going to school. I'm following them. And they're bringing me back at home because you are too young to go to school every day.
And later she said, I can't just go out every day and bring her back at home. I have to just let her go to school. And then she registered me to the school.

TODD HASKELL: How old were you at that time?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: I was too young, like 6 years old. But in Chad, they bring people at school at 7, 8, something like that. So I went to school the first year. And the surprise was I met some young girls that went to school last year telling me that I am very lucky to be in the first grade. I'm like, why?
They said the teacher is always sleeping, so you have time to do whatever you want. And I was like, what do you mean? You go and see by yourself. So when I went to the class the first day, everyone is in the class. The teacher, he closed the door and then he's left.
Like, OK. And that's really bold.

TODD HASKELL: That's terrible.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: And then everybody is playing like, whoa. I'm like OK, that's the first day. Let's see tomorrow. And then he did it for four days. And this fifth day I stayed at home.
And my father was like, why are you staying at home? You are the one who is always running to go to school. I'm like, there's no school. And when he asked me, I said the teacher is always sleeping. And he said, you're kidding me? I said that's the truth.
So he went back to school and he check by himself. He went to the supervisors and we did a big problem out of it. And the teacher was so angry on me that he was beating me every day because of what I did. So every day they ask him to leave the door open, and a supervisor are coming over all the time. So that's the beginning.

TODD HASKELL: That's the first time you caused trouble.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Yeah. That's first time, to cause trouble. And then later on in the secondary school, we have some clubs and some union of students. And I found out that in this union, we don't have girls involved in. And I'm like, why don't you involve girls? And I had some awareness to do to the girls. Because girls are refusing to be part of the club. That's why. So I had to work hard for them to be within the club. Because the club is the only one structure able to complain the voices of all students. So it means that if we are not inside, our voices are not heard.
So we have to be in it. And later, I had some problem with the guys. Do you know how old are you? The guys, they're talking about my age. Because my age is — it's completely different than they are.
And the ladies that I am pushing are also so older. And the guys are like, what are you doing? Do you know how old are you? I'm like, I know how old I am. That's why I'm not involving myself, but I'm pushing other people to get involved on it.

TODD HASKELL: Through all of this, you're making a big splash and you're doing things that I think young girls don't normally do in where you're from. What did your parents think? Were they supportive? It sounds like your dad, your father was very supportive when you were complaining about the fact that there was — well, the teacher was just sleeping. Did your parents remain supportive of you?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Yeah, they did. I think the reason why I keep doing all that is because they believe that what I'm doing is right. Because I'm always sharing what I'm doing at school and everywhere with them. There's no secrets.
When I found out that something is wrong, I'm also talking to them and then having their point of view about the problem before acting some of the times. But some of the time the acting come first,

and then I will tell them about the problem. But we're always supportive to what I'm doing. And that's why I kept doing the same thing.

TODD HASKELL: That's great. And as a girl doing this, as a woman doing this, being so active and doing that, did people ever say that wasn't the right role for a woman? Not the right role for a girl? Did they suggest that you shouldn't be doing those kind of things? Not your parents, but your peers and your teachers and other people like that?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Not really teachers bad. The students in general, they think I am different.

TODD HASKELL: I think you are.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: And I can also come back to my childhood, and that's the difference that they told me. Because when I was very young, I don't know what I did, but the parents are always like, when people are running to play with dolls and all that thing, I'm not doing the same thing. And they don't know why.

TODD HASKELL: What were you doing?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: I could be maybe reading some cartoons, like cartoon books, and all that. Because the English that I am speaking today, I started learning from a very low age. When I started speaking English, there's not all English in this city. But because I had the chance to go to the library and taking books every day, I was just negotiating with the library guy. When you go back to the capital city, can you please bring me some different books and all that?
And he started bringing some books with different language. And he said this is English. I'm like, OK. I will try English. Because there is no other baby books. I finished the cartoons.
The whole library I finished. The guy's like, why are you coming every day? I'm like, but I finished this one! I don't know what to do with this one. I already finish it. I need another one.
So I started learning English without even knowing the importance of this language. I didn't know English is spoken almost everywhere in the world. So my peers, they think I'm speaking an old language. They say, oh, she want to start speaking something that you don't understand.
But they don't even know English. We are very young to understand all that. So this difference is maybe in many sense, my childhood.

TODD HASKELL: So this spirit was born within you well before you ever came on the Mandela Washington Fellowship. You had this urge to learn, you read all the books in the library, you moved on. And what was it like when you went on to N'Djamena and you began to become a teenager and a little bit older. I know you started a business.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Yeah. When we came to N'Djamena and I went to high school, I've also got involved in the school students' association. As we are doing business school, in the class, in the MBA classes we don't see girls. And at the beginning, I really wanted to go to architecture, but there is no school for architecture in Chad. And they said if you want to go to architecture, let's prepare some papers for you and get a visa for you for France and all that thing.
And when they counted the times, I would be losing one year. I'm like, I'm not going to lose this one year. Maybe I will think about that later. But I went for accounting and business administration.

TODD HASKELL: In Chad?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Yeah, in Chad. But the problem is the people that we have in the class, most of them are men. And they have or already started doing some business. But we don't have girls.
The teacher is like, are you sure, did you start any business. I'm like, not yet. I don't have any business yet. Are you sure you want to go to the business schools? Yes, I'm going to go to business schools.
And I asked question, why we don't have ladies in there? And when I was talking with some ladies, they want to go and have a degree, work in an office, get some salary, and that's it. So almost all of them are like, I don't know, but if I got a wonderful job, I think I would be successful. But the problem is I can't call it success because it's normal. Everybody who has a degree, one of the day get a job and have some salary.
And it's like you didn't use the potential in you. You can do more than that. And I was working in a business, not my own, but in a network marketing business, where two years after I found myself taking care of 400 official distributors in my own computer. When the new distributor came to the office, they were like, we are looking for Amalkher. And that's me!
Not you. I'm looking for Amalkher. You're going to come back to me. And when they come back, they're like, are you sure you are the manager of — it's called Edmark, Edmark International. Are you sure you are the manager of Edmark International?
I'm like, yeah, I am. It's not easy, but you know, it's just internet. That's the problem when in the country people are not more involved in the new technology for information and communication. It seems really strange.

TODD HASKELL: People didn't believe that you were the head because you were a woman. And they expected to see a man having all this responsibility. Is that right?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Even if it's not a man, they expect to see an older woman, not a child. I'm sorry. Not like — somebody like that. That's not to you. I'm looking for somebody else.
But the problem is the gender problem exist. That's the reality in Chad. That people don't believe in the potential of woman. That's a real problem that we are fighting with the Women International for Peace and Freedom. And because you can feel it everywhere.
Because later on in 2012, have created my own building company that people like you are now crazy. Now you confirm that you're crazy. The problem is when I was looking for the license, the registration of my company, all throughout the process, people are calling me from the beginning, in the middle, at the end. Amalkher — because some of them know me — are you sure you are going to create a building company? I'm like, OK, yeah.
Did you see Amalkher in the paper? Yes. So just keep moving it. So when I had the company out, the problem was the gender, and that's clear. Because I targeted the government situations because we have some maintenance problem.
It's not a matter of just having a building. But you have to take care of the building to be a beautiful one. Because if you would just build it and leave it, that's not good at all. So my company is focusing on building and the maintenance of this buildings. And when there is a contract going out in a newspaper, and then I went for the contact, most of the time I'm out.
And when I decided not to just go for the competitions, but go by myself presenting my company to

the people and leaving them the overview of the company in case they can maybe call me for anything that they want. But the problem is, they don't believe that you can do that. Yeah. No, I can't give you my building's contract because I don't think you can do it the right way. Or I don't think you can build it the way I really want it. So it's like they don't believe in it really. And it's very hard.

TODD HASKELL: Have you been able to overcome that with the businesses? Is the business successful?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Yeah, I can say it's successful today because I've changed my strategy. Because going to the people that don't believe in the work that you will do is not a solution. I can maybe come back later by proving them the contrary or the opposite. But now I am targeting the international NGOs, the people coming from outside that believe the work that a woman can do is the same that the work that a man can do.

TODD HASKELL: It's often better.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: So I'm targeting this people like the embassies, and the NGOs, and the United Nations organizations. I have some small contacts for the beginning. And I think that's the success. Because if you already start having some contracts and doing a wonderful work, there will just notice the work that you're doing. And they will just come back to you by asking your service, because the service is perfect.

TODD HASKELL: So how did you first hear about the Mandela Washington Fellowship? Was it on the internet? Did friends tell you about it? When did you first hear about it for the first time?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: The first time I heard about is because I am in the newsletter of something called Opportunity Desk. That every time they give the available opportunities that there are. And I came to the one, Mandela Washington. And when I went through it, I found out that it's a very interesting program. And I didn't hesitate a minute.
I directly applied for it. And it was a surprise because they select people from 25 to 35. But at the time I was 24. And they said they will consider some successful people under 25. But I applied, but when the result come, I was like, that's wonderful. And I didn't expect to have such a good experience here.

TODD HASKELL: Well tell me about that. So you applied, you did your interview, you got selected. Obviously, you must have been very excited about that.
You took your first trip to the United States. And I think you went to New Orleans, right? You were in Tulane University to attend the six-week class. What were your first impressions when you arrived in the United States?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: I've been at United States before, like two times. But this time was different because I've been there for vacancies and something else, a conference of one week.

TODD HASKELL: For a vacation, or for — right.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: But this time is a long time, and it was different. When I came here I've been in New Orleans, that I can call a unique city because of the diversity and people

are very friendly there.
And I also want to point out the fact that we came here on the Ramadan day, Ramadan time. But it is so strange. We didn't feel anything bad. Like everybody is taking care of us. You are fasting? OK. We can keep some food for you. People are so good. Every time I come back home, I'm like, these people are really wonderful people. Because they don't really care about any differences. They're all the same.
And if you have something, they're ready to take care of you. And the program was also wonderful because we had different experience. We went out for some institution to see how they work. And we had some cultural night. And I think in New Orleans, we experienced many things like food, different cultures. New Orleans it's like a city that's always welcoming.

TODD HASKELL: So you're there. You're in Tulane, and there's 24 other Fellows from across the continent. What was that experience like meeting Africans from across the continent, and spending so much time with them?
Were you surprised by how much you had in common? Or were you surprised by how different you felt? Or what was your experience there?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: It was, I can call it again, a unique experience. Because when we are in a team, we sometimes have to forget about our differences and come together for one goal. Some of the Americans are calling Africa a country. I wish it is a country because sometimes you have to feel unique. You have to feel like the same people from the same place, and addressing same problems.
And that's what I felt when I was in the team. Because every evening we are sitting together talking serious problems. Because most of the time we have groups, and when they have free time it's just to dance or having a good time. But we're like no. We are not doing it every day. Some of the day we have to sit and talk about our different problems all over our countries and see what you can propose from me, what I can propose for you. And it was a very constructive. We kept doing it because we have created a Whatsapp group of the 25 people that went to Tulane.

TODD HASKELL: So you remain in touch with them?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Yeah, we remain in touch and we've been talking about serious problem about our work, what we do in our country, and giving contributions, ideas.

TODD HASKELL: Were there any fellows in particular you became very close friends with? Or that you learned a lot about their country?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Yeah, of course. And that's natural because when you are in a group, you become close to some people and not everyone. Of course I had a close friend from Kenya. And that talked much to me, because I've never been in Kenya. And today I know a lot about Kenya thanks to him.
And he was also asking about Chad. So it's like we are sharing different experiences. And at the end of the day, you've never been in Chad, but you know a lot about Chad because there's somebody telling you the reality. Somebody who is within the problems, within the every days aspect of Chad, telling you the reality of the country. So it was a wonderful experience.

TODD HASKELL: Would you recommend it to other Chadians? That they apply for the Fellowship?

Do you recommend it on a regular basis now when you're back?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Yeah. When I went back, the #YALILearns courses that we have, I've been using them throughout the year. Every time we are calling young people to come to the #YALILearns and that's the opportunity to talk to them about the YALI itself. Because most of them have heard about it. And when you say, it's English. Most of them are going back because we have wonderful guys. We have wonderful young people doing magic things in the country. But the only one problem that they have is the Fellowship, it's all an English. Like even the interview in the embassies are in English.
So that's the only one problem we have. But myself, I'm recommending this program to every young person in the country. And as a matter of fact, we had this big estimating that I was talking about earlier. And I didn't forget to remind them about YALI, because it's nothing to do with YALI, right? But I reminded of them because I'm like, oh, this is the chance. I'm not going to be able to bring all of them again, so let's talk about YALI and tell them that it's going to be in November or something like that. And let them apply more and more. And the result is the first year we had three Chadians here in 2014. We had four in 2015. Now we have 10. We can say it's because they became 1,000. But I don't think so. I think the reason is we mobilized a lot of young people to apply for it.

TODD HASKELL: That's a terrific story. And let me say also at the end of the six weeks, first you go through the six weeks of training. You have these terrific opportunities to meet people from across Africa, obviously people across New Orleans. There's this academic training. But then you get the chance to come to Washington and attend the summit. What was the highlight of the summit for you?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: This summit was magic. First of all, because it's not only 25 of us, it's 500. And you see a young person every time going this way or the other and from the same group. And what is fantastic is you can imagine the potential of every one of the Fellows because I can think it's explosive potential that all of us have. And I believe that every young person has potential. The reason why we have many problems all across the globe is because some of them don't know how to use it positively. Then they go for the negative way. And that's why we have a lot of problems today.
So we can maybe help them go to the positive way by doing something like this program. I think this program is phenomenal. So in the summit, besides meeting all of them and having the name and faces book, that is like a treasure, we hold also the opportunity to meet the President of the United States in person.

TODD HASKELL: What was that like?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: It was really fantastic. I can say because I've never met my own president, I didn't expect to meet him. But through this program I had the chance to meet him. And most importantly, the message that he has to the African youth.

TODD HASKELL: What is that message?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: That's the most important part. And we were talking about — the president was telling us about the good governance. To build a society, we have some secrets. And the secrets are, you have to start from the baby. You can't just leave a child having whatever

education, and then you come after he's 18 years old.
And it's like, why did you do that? Don't do it this way. No, he's not going to hear you, right? Because you didn't take care of him since his childhood.
So if we want to address and bring solution to our problems, we have to go to the basic level of education, of health. Because it's a matter of awareness. It's not like every problem should be addressed only by money. But we can address the biggest problem in the world just because we know how to address them. But awareness, telling people the right way, bringing them from this bad path to another good one.
So I think his message about the good governance, the human rights, because that's the main problem we have there, the corruption. You can talk about corruption in public in Chad, because it's normal. If you want to address all that, it's true all of us here today. The Fellows and going back to the children going to school now. We have to help them since that level.
So when they grow up, they will grow up with a different point of view, grow up with a different picture of what they want to do, and the things will change automatically. We don't have to be behind. Everything will change by itself. So I think that's the message that I got from him. And I will try my best to make it work in my community.

TODD HASKELL: What really comes through to me listening to you speak is that all your life people were telling you things that you can't do, and you insisted on doing them anyway and you made it work. You've been a tremendous change maker even before you ever came on the Fellowship. And I congratulate you for that.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Thank you.

TODD HASKELL: But going back to Chad after this tremendous experience in the United States where you got to do the academic training, got to go to the summit, meet people from all over Africa, and meet President Obama, you go back to Chad. Did that take it to the next level for you? Did you feel even more empowered?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Yes, very, very empowered. And very empowered because someone has seen what I've been doing. Something like that. And it is encouraging me to do even more. It's not a matter of what I'm doing. I am every day. But it's much of the impact that what you're doing is making in your community and in the people living in it. That's why I am reminding young people every time that if you have an NGO, if you have an association of young people, of women, don't always wait for projects to be funded or waiting for money to start doing things. Because you are everything. You are everything.
You can do many things without money. You can decide making difference and letting people notice the difference that you are doing without $1. So that's the secret that many people don't know. Because we have many associations in Chad. And because of the program, as you were saying, when I went back I was trying to bring feedbacks from many of the association of young people and women about a problem, like why you're not going through? What is happening? Why you're not developing yourself or developing the NGO? And this answer that I'm having from them is the same. We have this project, and it didn't get funded. And I have also this project and that project and no money. So we decided, because we have created another organization called
Collectif Des Associations Pour La Citoyenneté Et La Sauvegarde Des Acquis Démocratiques Au Tchad.

TODD HASKELL: For Citizenship and the Safeguarding of Democracy.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: And Democratic Achievements, something like that. But through this organization, we are organizing special training to the NGOs and association leaders to let them know how they can get started even with zero. And making impacts. You don't have to underestimate your impact. The smallest impact you can do. So we are training them like association management. How to work without anything.
Because there is some of the thing that you can do like the training that we are doing. We didn't get any money. But the training is the key of everything.

TODD HASKELL: That's great.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Even in your own organization, you can start doing training to people. And you happening. That's the action that we're looking for. And today, just like we are, the office, mine is so crowded because every day we have many people inside. Can you tell me how they do this? How to do that? But the staff, we have a lot of people working with us. So we are playing the role of like councils, people giving advices.
Finally, we found ourselves doing that. But that's not the first goal of our own organization. So the goal is moving from here to that because people are asking for our help.

TODD HASKELL: You're shining a light, and I think people are coming towards it, because you're such a tremendous example. It strikes me, you've accomplished more in your life than many people do over their whole life, and yet you're — if I can say it — you're still young. Where do you see yourself in 20 or 25 years more? What would you like to achieve, ultimately? And I mean both for yourself, but also for Chad.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: I believe if you need to make a bigger change, you have to be able to affect the biggest part of the country and of the population. So where I see myself in — as you said, it's a long time, right? 20 years? 25?

TODD HASKELL: It goes like that (snaps fingers), believe me.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: It goes like that because I can also think about being the first president of Chad, a woman. Because for me, it's not a surprise. It's not something impossible. It's possible for everyone to think that way.
But the reason behind that could be different. You could think about that for you to have the biggest power to affect positively, and so things will grow quickly in your country. We need true people doing true things and right thing, fair things for the whole planet.

TODD HASKELL: And I think the lesson of your life too, is that you can't let people tell you no, it's too hard, it can't be done, because you've accomplished so many things.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: I hope so.

TODD HASKELL: We're going to probably close. But I do want to give you a chance, if there is any other message you want to deliver. This has been a fascinating conversation.
And I always feel so much better about the future of Africa when I talk to its young people. And I particularly feel that after this conversation. But what else would you like to tell the folks who are

listening to us now?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: What I want to tell the folks who are listening to us is to think about only one community, only one people, all over the world. We can also think about particularly the continent of Africa. And talking about this special program of YALI, let's think of being only one family, same people with same problem, and addressing all this problem together.
Let's come together to address this same problem. And let's stop putting barriers between all of us. And that's why working on the RAB, the regional advisory board — I'm also every day reminding people of the RAB is divided into three regions.

TODD HASKELL: Just for our listeners, the regional advisory boards are YALI Fellows from around West Africa, in your case, who were elected by the other Fellows. And there's 10 of you. And you work together in organizing YALI activities regionally.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Yeah, that's it. So it doesn't mean that the YALI group, it's divided. Let's think it's only one Africa. That's the message that I want to give to people.

TODD HASKELL: Great. Djibrine, this has been such a fascinating conversation. I know there's a lot of people out there who will want to reach out and have a conversation with you on social media or however, what's the best way that they can reach out and talk to you?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: The best way they can reach me is through Facebook with my name,

Amalkher Djibrine Souleymane. And also through Skype with Amalkher88.

TODD HASKELL: Great, thank you. Thanks so much for listening, and make sure to subscribe so you don't miss out on any of our fascinating interviews with other young African leaders from across the continent. Join the YALI Network at yali.state.gov and be part of something bigger.
Our theme music is "E Go Happen" by Grace Jerry, and produced by the Presidential Precinct. The YALI Voices podcast is brought to you by the United States Department of State, and as part of the Young African Leaders Initiative funded by the U.S. government. Thanks everyone.

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# Unleashing the Entrepreneur in Every Woman

Five Model X participants work together on a finance management and literacy application.

"We believe that everyone is an entrepreneur," said Takunda Chingonzoh, a 2014 Mandela Washington Fellow and YALI Network member. "It's only a matter of people finding that aspect of

themselves."

Recently, Chingonzoh and his team focused on helping one particular group find that aspect of themselves: women. They did it through their organization Neolab Technology.

Founded in 2012, Neolab began with a goal to develop technology fit for Africa. It has since grown into "a startup factory." The Neolab team recruits university students, trains them in entrepreneurship and forms them into teams. The teams work together to transform their ideas into sustainable enterprises.

This year, Neolab launched its first training course exclusively for women.

**Moments of Inspiration**

The inspiration for such a course began in the United States while Chingonzoh was participating in the Mandela Washington Fellowship. During class discussions, he observed that comments from the male Fellows relied more on generic knowledge while those from the female Fellows revealed a deep connectedness to the community.

"That was the initial spark," Chingonzoh said.

That spark ignited when Chingonzoh witnessed speeches from National Security Advisor Susan Rice, Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield and first lady Michelle Obama.

"I could see the kind of energy, the kind of presence they commanded and how it affected people," Chingonzoh said. "It was inspiring."

Through these experiences, Chingonzoh came to understand the roles women can play in leadership and technology and the valuable perspective they offer.

"I had been exposed to women in technology who were doing amazing things," Chingonzoh said. "So my question was 'How do you activate that same kind of drive in the women that we have in our societies?'"

**Training Exclusively for Women**

For Chingonzoh and the Neolab team, the answer rested with providing a training class exclusively for women. They recruited 12 women from the local university and ran them through their standard seven-week training curriculum, which they call "Model X."

The first part of Model X focuses on "activating the entrepreneur," Chingonzoh explained. The second part hones more conventional skills such as idea validation and team building.

For the women-only training, however, Neolab had to add an additional training element to its curriculum: confidence building.

"They would talk about these great ideas," Chingonzoh said, "but they would not have the confidence to push them across."

**Gender Differences**

In addition to their lack of confidence, Chingonzoh noticed another characteristic that set these women apart. They wanted to solve problems. They didn't want to create the next Facebook; they wanted to develop sustainable solutions that would help people and communities.

These women also displayed a dedication and tenacity Chingonzoh had not seen before.

"In the first class, you're the one asking people to do this, this and this. With the women, by the third or fourth class, they're the ones asking 'What's next? What can we do? How do we do this?'" Chingonzoh said. "They were taking the course with way more vigor and more drive than we had seen in previous classes."

For Chingonzoh and his team, the results of this women-only training have been both "amazing" and transformative. Neolab has not only decided to host a women-only training course every year, but also to shake up the gender balance of its training team. Chingonzoh said it's important for the women being trained to see other women in leadership roles. He believes this will provide them with a person whom they can relate to and will also boost their self-confidence.

"It's really important to publicize and celebrate the women that we have in our networks who are doing all these incredible and amazing things, because that in itself serves as a way to activate even more women and even more girls to break out and lift up their communities," he said.

To learn more about Neolab Technology, visit its Facebook page.

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# Education is power, says top U.S. diplomat for Africa

Assistant Secretary Linda Thomas-Greenfield (U.S. Institute of Peace)

Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the State Department's assistant secretary of state for African affairs, has a request to YALI Network members that fits well with the current #YALILearns campaign: take the time to educate your peers.

"There is nothing more powerful than education, and you can help," she told a group of 2016 Mandela Washington Fellows who are attending a program hosted by Howard University in Washington. "You can help one person. If you see someone on the street, hand them a book and sit down on the curb with them and teach them how to read, because reading is powerful and no matter what happens in your country, education can't be taken away from you."

Thomas-Greenfield said she gets her energy and a lot of happiness in her job thanks to YALI participants.

Because Africa's population is relatively young, with 50 to 70 percent under the age of 30, "you are

Africa's greatest future resource," she said, adding that when the current generation of leaders leave power, "young people will have no other choice but to stand up and take your leadership skills to the next level."

"I have tremendous hope for this continent. I don't think that Africa has lived up to its promise yet, but I know that it will. And I know it will because of you," Thomas-Greenfield said.

"This continent is rich in resources, including its people,and there's no reason that this continent should be so impoverished. There is no reason there should be a deficit in governance and a deficit in education. This continent ought to be a beacon to everyone in the world," she said.

"You have an opportunity to move this continent forward, and I am absolutely confident that you will do it," she told the group.

"Everywhere I go on the continent of Africa, I see young people like yourselves — not just YALI Fellows, but young people who are engaged, who are active, who are ambitious and who want to contribute to their country's future and their country's success," she said.

"We are making a difference because for every one of you, you are going to touch 10 people like you," Thomas-Greenfield said, challenging the group to use their experiences in America to the benefit of their home countries.

She urged them to use the YALI Network to stay in touch with each other after their return and to use it to support and mentor each other.

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# Is she 'bossy' or are you biased?

(Shutterstock)

More African women are breaking the "glass ceiling" in the business world by advancing to management positions. As a result, more women are finding themselves on the receiving end of criticism from both male and female subordinates. There are complaints like "she's bossy," or "she doesn't respect the people who work for her."

Would a male boss who acted in the same manner receive the same kinds of comments? According to studies, probably not. Old habits die hard, and one of them is the perception that male authority is respected while female authority is "unbecoming" or even threatening.

"Africa still is a deeply patriarchal society in most areas, where women have to struggle to even voice their opinions let alone rise to a managerial position. So it is the norm that when they do, they are held in contempt by male subordinates who still feel that it is not a man's place to answer [or] report to a woman," said Sherifah Tumusiime, CEO of Zimba Group Ltd.

Dudu Msomi, CEO of Busara Leadership Partners, said women leaders also fall victim to what she calls the “pedestal syndrome” in the business world.

“This is when women are put on a pedestal with puritan, stereotypical expectations and views in which women should not do wrong according to the standards of the observer. Thus when a woman does things that do not embody the expectations, they are severely judged and crucified,” she said, adding that women workers “tend to also be tougher on other women.”

As African women who are also business leaders, Msomi and Tumusiime are helping to lead the path for their peers. Unfortunately, female bosses often face double standards, unconscious or otherwise, compared to their male counterparts. Being aware of this can help women as they assert their rights as corporate leaders.

Women should not be shy or apologetic about having a leadership role, said Msomi.

“There are decisions that require a leader to take charge and be authoritarian. Not every situation is a democracy. Thus leaders have the prerogative to not always consult. It is not a sex or gender issue. It is related to an individual leadership style and the circumstances that are prevailing at that particular moment,” she said.

Tumusiime said businesswomen can do whatever their male counterparts can do, and the best response to bias is simply to do your best and be professional.

“Respect is earned and not demanded, so respect others but most importantly respect yourself. Treat everyone in your team fairly without any sort of bias. Praise in public and reproach in private. You cannot control the perception of others, but you certainly can control your reaction to them, and the best reaction to them is none,” she said.

If you are a woman looking to become a leader in a male-dominated business world, here are five pieces of advice:

- Always remember that business, money and career do not have a gender and do not care what sex you are. Your gender is just one aspect of who you are.
- “Intuition” is a gift, so do not be afraid to use it. It simply means you are able to understand something quickly on a subconscious level, drawing from past experiences and external cues.
- Everyone has an individual definition of “respect,” and it is important to communicate your expectations. For example, there are different views on punctuality and the degrees to which others need to be kept informed.
- Do not assume that your colleagues always understand what you want or that bad situations will change on their own. Performance management and other meetings are worthwhile venues to discuss issues in both group and private settings.
- Everyone has some kind of gender bias. Even professional gender-equality advocates admit they sometimes catch themselves making unfair assessments. Step back, take a breath, and take pride in your role as a pioneer.

# Young Rwandan innovator meets Obama

President Obama, joined by Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg (far right), moderates a panel of entrepreneurs including Jean Bosco Nzeyimana of Rwanda (center). (Flickr/GES)

Rwanda's Jean Bosco Nzeyimana recently lived a day he'll never forget.

Nzeyimana is one of three entrepreneurs at the 2016 Global Entrepreneurship Summit in Silicon Valley who was asked to talk business — on stage, in front of a global audience and a phalanx of cameras — with the president of the United States and the founder of Facebook.

"Today was one of the biggest days of my life," he said afterward. "I got to meet President Obama himself and exchange ideas."

On stage, prompted by Obama, Nzeyimana explained the impetus for his business. Having grown up collecting firewood so his family could cook meals, he was driven to start a company at age 19 called Habona Ltd., which uses biogas and produces briquettes to use as environmental cooking fuel.

Here's how he explained the startup to the president:

**A shoutout to the YALI Network**

Nzeyimana is one of the Young African Leaders Initiative Network's nearly 250,000 members across sub-Saharan Africa. The network is part of an effort by President Obama to encourage young African adults to become active in business, community organizing and public management.

After meeting with Obama and Zuckerberg, Nzeyimana spoke to YALI Network coordinator Macon Phillips about the experience.

Nzeyimana said he had been nervous and unsure, but he was put at ease by Obama's listening skills. "He was humble, willing to listen to us, willing to talk to us, and that … immediately removed all of the nerves that had been attacking us before we met him," he said.

Nzeyimana thanked Phillips for helping him to join like-minded leaders across the continent, specifically to plant trees and teach others about environmental issues during a "YALI Goes Green" campaign.

According to Nzeyimana, while he knows a lot of entrepreneurs, he had formed an incorrect version of Zuckerberg in his imagination: he expected an imposing, even intimidating, executive type. But Zuckerberg — wearing running shoes, a T-shirt and jeans — chatted for 20 minutes backstage with Nzeyimana before the formal discussion.

He was a "normal guy, a cool guy," Nzeyimana said. "Success is not for a particular type of person."

Nzeyimana recorded this message to his friends in the YALI Network and to anyone in Africa considering a business idea. He reiterates a point made by Zuckerberg, who argued that most beginning entrepreneurs, including himself at one time, don't focus on business, but tend to simply think about whatever problem they hope to solve.

"The [business] policies and the other partners take hold as we come along the way," Nzeyimana said. He now employs 25 people and continues to be fueled by his desire to help move society forward.

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# YALI Voices Podcast: Co-founder of Nigerian Youths in Motion propels education reform

(YouTube – Presidential Precinct)

"I need to be the kind of person that creates opportunities," Oluwatimilehir "Timi" Olagunju from Nigeria tells the State Department's Macon Phillips in a podcast.

Through his non-profit organization Nigerian Youths in Motion (NYM), Timi helps empower over 350 young Nigerians in engaging their community, government and institutions to help create better opportunities for themselves and their peers.

NYM "was born out of a need to harness the intellectual energies and creativity of young people. So it was channeling it towards making policy recommendations to the government," he said.

So far the organization has been able to increase Nigeria's education budget by 350 percent since 2012.

What's next for this hardworking lawyer, writer and speaker? Listen to the full podcast to find out!

*Don't have access to Sound Cloud?  Read a transcript of the podcast below:*

Yes we can. Sure we can. Change the world.

MACON PHILLIPS: Welcome young African leaders. This is the YALI Voices podcast. A place to share some of the best stories from the Young African Leaders Initiative network. My name is Macon Phillips. Thank you for joining us today. Don't forget to subscribe to this podcast by visiting yali.state.gov to stay up-to-date on everything YALI. And if you like what you hear, we'd love it if you'd recommend us to your friends.

I recently had the chance to sit down with Timi Olagunju. Timi is a really interesting guy from Nigeria. He's a lawyer. He's an author. He's a speaker. And he's really passionate about good

governance. Someday, he might even be president of Nigeria.

At age 10, Timi's father left, his mother lost her job, and he was forced to finish his primary education in a barely functioning public school. From that point on, Timi has dedicated his life to fighting for good governance, human rights, democracy, and you. He credits his work ethic and values, not surprisingly, to his mom. And that's where we'll pick up the interview.

Let's start. Tell me about your mom, Timi.

TIMI OLAGUNJU: OK. My mum was a fantastic woman. I grew up with my mum and she gave me the opportunity to become the man that I am and will be through dedication towards investment in education, and an emphasis on values, and the need to serve the people, service, basically. So those core values were quite fundamental and I learned them through my mum.

MACON PHILLIPS: Look, we've all been kids.

TIMI OLAGUNJU: Yeah.

MACON PHILLIPS: Sometimes having your parents say you need to get out there and do public service isn't exactly what you want to hear. You know what I mean? So how was your mom able to get you in the right direction? What was her style like? Was she kind of stern and drawing the lines or was she real friendly?

TIMI OLAGUNJU: She was real friendly.

MACON PHILLIPS: OK.

TIMI OLAGUNJU: She was not particularly empathetic as to– what's it called– how it should go. But there's this thing about I learned from her which is the fact that when you create the right environment for child, you see the child explore the context of that environment to develop personal creativity, develop personal values. And that's something she does.

She insures that I get busy with the right things. She enrolls me in the right association. Gets me involved with her. I come back from school she says, where's your homework? So basically, it's about the environment.

Even my influence towards studying law was not– she said, what did you want to study? And I looked. I said engineering. I'm good at math. OK Accounting. I'm good at economics. And law? Hmm, well it's good, Timi. So it was more like that.

MACON PHILLIPS: So did you come out of that house on a straight line knowing exactly what you wanted to do and no interference.

[LAUGHING]

No problems. You know, just a cake walk all the way through?

TIMI OLAGUNJU: Not at all. Not at all.

MACON PHILLIPS: What happened? Where did it all go wrong?

TIMI OLAGUNJU: OK. Well, basically, the truth about it is they say he has to go around [INAUDIBLE] sometimes. Sometimes you take the non out of the nonsense. You find sense. So the nonsense, where the non came into the sense, was from really during my teenage years when I didn't particularly know what I wanted to do.

I was so good at [INAUDIBLE] and mathematics. I perhaps was so good that I thought engineering was my way and, at that time, my math teacher loved me. So I felt that, well, this is it. And then, consequently, I lead to decide, OK, no, accounting. I think I should be an accountant. And then later on, law.

But during that time, before then, there was a time that– because I started my primary school, it was one of the best schools in Nigeria– I was taught by Kenyans. To be frank, Kenyans actually have some of the best teachers too. So we had Kenyan teaches. I had Irish teachers. I had teachers from the UK teaching.

But at the time, my dad traveled and then I didn't have the opportunity to see him anymore. And then my mom had to take up the responsibility of catering for a young man who was– and then, at that time, several things happened and then everything collapsed.

So I had to move from a private school that was high class, high brow, with the high things. I came to a really public school, secondary high school. That's a secondary school. And, in that secondary school, you have to find chairs. Sometimes we had to struggle to get chairs. So the big guys like you, you, and the small guys like us, would have to tussle chairs out.

And then you find that teachers never came to class. So they were more particular about coming to class when the investigators were around. So that gave me an understanding, the look. I was coming from this world. Now I'm in this particular world.

The difference here is the fact that it is not as if the people in this other world do not have capacities, but they don't have opportunities. So that stuck in my mind. I need to be the kind of person that creates opportunities. And then that drove, in my mind, I need to be that kind of person.

Because the kind of person that can drive policies, that provide equal opportunities for the young and security for the old. Because when you create security for the old, the young they are more interested, excited about working hard in the future. So that actually drove my line towards law, governments, policy.

MACON PHILLIPS: Right. So walk us through that. So you're in secondary school. You get, kind of, a splash of water in the face. Like, this is the way the world works and–

TIMI OLAGUNJU: You need to be calm.

MACON PHILLIPS: Realizing– yeah, we have to stay calm. That's right. We've all had those moments. And so you decide then that you really want to pursue a career that creates opportunities for other people. So just walk us quickly through where you went from there and how you found yourself in a law school classroom.

TIMI OLAGUNJU: Exactly. So consequently, in my secondary school, it was the senior years, somehow I stumbled into a Press Club. And in the Press Club we would write articles. Articles about

teachers were strategic and systematic. How can you fight the same people that you– on that same roof and we'd write the articles and paste them in the schools. So it was trouble.

So from there I moved into becoming the acting editor in chief for the Press Club. And there I really came to start concretizing my ideals in terms of the capacity to actually vocalize, accentuate your ideas in such a way that it influences people. So I started through words. And then from there, law.

So I studied law at the university . And so, at the university, I already had an idea of the fact that, look, I was more tilted towards leadership and governance. And so, at the university, I just decided to look. After the first year. After having a good foundation. A good grade. Because even the ladies know that, if the foundation be destroyed, what can [INAUDIBLE] do? You know. And that's the truth.

So I wanted to create a good foundation because I understand the importance of foundation in primary school. That helped me even when I was not in the same level at the primary school. And then at 200 level, I started getting into leadership. I was very involved in leadership until I literally became the chairman of the largest undergraduate hostel in the university.

And, at then, there was no student union. So ultimately because of that rule, I became the interim student union president for a whole year. And then that really gave me another platform to [INAUDIBLE] beyond just writing and words because I came to [INAUDIBLE] through words.

People like the way I talk and when I write. So they, hey, who's this Timi guy? And then leadership opportunity came and then I started developing my capacity to lead. And after going through law school and all that, I focused more around law, governance, and leadership and everything that I do, at this moment, around that. Everything.

MACON PHILLIPS: So now how long ago was that? When did you finish law school?

TIMI OLAGUNJU: 2009.

MACON PHILLIPS: So 2009. So what have the last seven years been for you in terms of focusing on governance? I'm sure you've kept learning. I'm sure you kept succeeding and failing and then trying to chart a course through all this. So take us through the last seven years. What have you been working on?

TIMI OLAGUNJU: Yes. Well, fantastic. When people hear seven years, they look at my face and they say, OK, he's not that old.

[LAUGHING]

Well, I just became 30 years a few weeks ago.

MACON PHILLIPS: That's not that old. Don't worry. Don't worry. You don't have any gray hairs yet. So don't worry about that.

TIMI OLAGUNJU: So basically I had to clarify that. The truth about it is through that time I first went through tutelage. I worked with some seniors and all that, in the law practice, and so that I can get an understanding of what it was like. And then, two years doing that, I knew that I just had to do

something different.

So we started up the Nigerian Youths in Motion. The Nigerian Youths in Motion was born out of a need to harness the intellectual energies and creativity of young people. So it was channelling it towards making policy recommendations to the government. And so we started that up. I became a co-founder and throughout that we've, through the Nigerian Youths in Motion, we've made a lot of successes, in education for instance.

In 2012 budgets, we were able to increase the budget for education from around $110 million naira to over 350% and it's not being done in the last 15 years.

MACON PHILLIPS: Well, that will buy some more chairs, right?

TIMI OLAGUNJU: Yes.

MACON PHILLIPS: You know what I mean?

TIMI OLAGUNJU: Exactly.

MACON PHILLIPS: That's great.

TIMI OLAGUNJU: And we did that–

MACON PHILLIPS: How did you do that?

TIMI OLAGUNJU: Exactly.

MACON PHILLIPS: One of the things I hear from people when I talk to them, and this is in the states, but certainly when I talk to people in YALI, it's easy to describe the problem, but the government and changes in policy can seem so far away. How did you even start? Where's the first step?

TIMI OLAGUNJU: That's the key point. That is a fundamentally key point. And that's what we need to learn because evidence is the end of argument. Most times you don't look around us enough to see those who are doing something around what we seem to want to solve and then learn from there.

The strategy's just simple. We went. We declared a policy statement stating the facts. And that's why you need to get your facts right with the right team of people. You need a body. All the civil rights movements in the US, all the movements in the world that succeed, do not will succeed on the shoulders of individuals. There's not like [INAUDIBLE].

You need to create a structure. And so we came up with a structure, the Nigerian Youths in Motion. The structure started gaining momentum. That's people that buy into the same ideals. That's people. The people start to recommend policy. Policy connected with people recommend policy.

But we didn't stop at that. We had to be strategic. So being a lawyer, I used my legal skills in courts. Most all the issues were won out of the courts, mobilizing young people. So for that particular issue, we had what we call, push. Protest until something happens. And we're focused and our focus was education.

Where is cut everywhere? Where in education, in finance, in procurement? No Tom, Dick, and Harry. We're just Tom. I let Dick and Harry alone. So education. We focused on that. We zoomed down. Put all our strategies to it. Interestingly, with media, press publicity, and at all. And that's the same strategy.

MACON PHILLIPS: Same focus.

TIMI OLAGUNJU: Yes. So that's one thing young people need to understand. It's not an individual thing. It's not about competition. It's about complementation.

MACON PHILLIPS: Now, in terms of the specific focus, education was the topic, but your example success was pretty specific. You were able to say this budget was increased by x percentage so–

TIMI OLAGUNJU: Yes.

MACON PHILLIPS: In terms of your message, what you were saying to the government, what you were saying to the media, what you were saying to other people that wanted to join the group, were you moving beyond simply, education's important, we need to do something about it, to a more specific ask.

TIMI OLAGUNJU: The strategy to get people inclined with the ideal was simple. Not everybody was focused on education. That's the truth. Some people were more focused on cost of health. Some people were more focused about graduating and getting a job. Employment.

But, somehow, the think tank were able to come up with a strategy that outlines all the different needs around the central theme of education. And so, if your issue is health, we'll make you realize the connection between health and education. So our campaign was around that. And the social media was very powerful. But outside the social media were also these hand deals.

MACON PHILLIPS: Combine the online and the offline.

TIMI OLAGUNJU: Yes. To galvanize people.

MACON PHILLIPS: That's an amazing victory and I assume that organization's continuing?

TIMI OLAGUNJU: Yes. That's one of the many.

MACON PHILLIPS: Youths are still in motion?

TIMI OLAGUNJU: Yes. Yes. Still in motion. In fact, we've even moved beyond Youths in Motion. We've moved to the Good Governance Hub which started last year after the elections.

MACON PHILLIPS: In Nigeria?

TIMI OLAGUNJU: Yes. Now the Good Governance Hub came up on off-shoot of Nigerian Youths in Motion. But then Good Governance Hub came up after the election. We did a survey in the Nigerian Youths in Motion. We looked at whether the electoral capacity, being the fact that young people voted massively, translated to power for young people. Nigeria is a country, 18 to 35, 65% of the population. Young people. Massively young people.

Now the truth about it is this. That should be reflected in political participation. And, if it is not, then there's a problem. The democracy, with inclusiveness. And so we did a research. Federal parliamentarians, how many federal parliamentarians are between the ages of 30 and 35? Shocker. Just one. And that one parliamentarian, this year, he's 36. Already he's crossed over. Simply we don't have a youth now.

We now went forward. We said, look, let's be a little bit generous. OK? Let's go 36 to 40. Can we get someone within that age? We got only nine people. And then we looked at lead women. OK, women between the ages of 30 and 40, because 30 is the age you can vote. And that's one of things we are fighting. That, if you can pay your taxes at 18, and you can join the army and die for your country at 18, it is logical, sensible, and correct that you can also be voted for at 18. So that's a push.

But then, 30 to 40 for females, we didn't find any. So that spotted something. Now, look, we need to increase political participation. So Good Governance Hub.

MACON PHILLIPS: Right. And so that's–

TIMI OLAGUNJU: Was [INAUDIBLE] last year. We've had three events with successes also. With a different strategy from the Nigerian Youths in Motion. You know, Nigerian Youths in Motion is more on focusing. But the Good Governance Hub is now becoming a Hub. And, in the next 10 years, in the next 15 years, our goal is to make the Good Governance Hub become an innovation center that will not just only increase youth participation directly, but to engage young people to solve community problems around governance and democracy.

MACON PHILLIPS: And are you looking really just within Nigeria? Or are you looking regionally?

TIMI OLAGUNJU: Nigeria. For the next 10 years. And then the success in Nigeria will be a pilot for a sort of franchise for other success stories to spring forward from there.

MACON PHILLIPS: Well, I'm sure as you know, throughout YALI and even beyond YALI, there's a ton of Timi's in other countries that are focused on good governance and some sort of [INAUDIBLE] network model. So my guess is that you're going to be, if you already aren't already, lashed up with other people sharing those best practices. And you strike me as someone who may never sleep. I don't know.

[LAUGHING]

A lot of energy. So would you say you're someone who is an early morning riser or are you a late night owl?

TIMI OLAGUNJU: Well, I do a lot of the stuff in the night and also in the morning.

MACON PHILLIPS: Exactly. So you never sleep.

TIMI OLAGUNJU: Well, in the afternoon, I take some great key nap. Because I know I'm most active in the morning and in the night. So I do a lot of thinking in the morning because you can't give what you don't have. In my book, The Hustler's Mentality, I wrote about the peak time, the peak place. Your peak time defers. For me, my peak time is morning and also night, so I try to maximize that. Then in the afternoon, I could have fun and just relax.

MACON PHILLIPS: OK. All right. I like that. That's good. Well, we are hearing from the future president of Nigeria here. You heard it here first.

TIMI OLAGUNJU: Yes. Yes.

MACON PHILLIPS: We got the early interview.

TIMI OLAGUNJU: Yes.

[LAUGHING]

MACON PHILLIPS: We'll have the follow-up interview in your office, in a few years.

TIMI OLAGUNJU: Yes.

MACON PHILLIPS: And it's just been a real treat talking to you. I really appreciate it. Thanks for all of your time today. Thank you for being here.

TIMI OLAGUNJU: It's a pleasure.

MACON PHILLIPS: Well it's pretty clear that Timi is an energetic, natural leader who's really making things happen in Nigeria and I want to thank him for spending his time with all of us today. If you'd like to get in touch with him, check him out on Twitter at Timi the law. That's T-I-M-I-T-H-E-L-A-W, and on Facebook as Timmy Olagunju.

His books, The Hustlers Mentality, Leading From Within, and Yes, Africa Can, are both available online. Don't forget to check out his organizations as well, Nigerian Youths in Motion and the Good Governance Hub.

Thanks so much for listening and make sure to subscribe so you don't miss any of the upcoming interviews with other young African leaders. Join the YALI network at yali.state.gov and be part of something bigger. Our theme music is E Go Happen by Grace Jerry, produced by the Presidential Precinct. The YALI voices podcast is brought to you by the US Department of State and is part of the Young African Leaders Initiative, which is funded by the US government.

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# To host a #YALILearns event, you don't need to be an expert!

YALI Network member Kerry Byamungu holds a #YaliLearns event on #Africa4Her in Tanzania. (Courtesy of Kerry Byamungu)

For the past two weeks, the YALI Network has called on members to join its #YALILearns initiative as a way of giving back to the community. If you're interested, first take an online course. You can

choose among topics ranging from business and entrepreneurship to climate change to civic leadership. After passing the quiz at the end of the course and earning your certificate, the next step is to plan an event and share what you learned with others.

You can use the YALI Network online courses as a great way to generate discussion around whichever of those topics is of interest to your community,

In Ghana, Oxford Bonsu used the course "Community Organizing for Action" as the basis for an event that brought together 45 chiefs of the Ashanti region to discuss laws of land use in their region and to explore ways their lands could be used as equity for business investment.

"I was humbled," Bonsu wrote on the YALI Network Face2Face page, "when one of the chiefs present pronounced the workshop unprecedented in the history of the traditional council."

**Facilitate instead of teach**

The good news is that you are not expected to be an expert on the subject you have chosen to share. The courses are designed so that of all the information is provided by the videos, audio files or transcripts. Instead of being a teacher who has to come up with a curriculum, you are a facilitator. In other words, your job is much less formal than someone who expected to deliver a lecture or have all of the answers. Instead, you are a fellow member of the group — one who is driving the discussion and encouraging everyone to participate.

A #YALILearns event doesn't have to feel like a classroom. Facilitation is about empowering others. A skilled facilitator will create conditions in which a group can work together effectively. They will also steer everyone back toward the end goal whenever the discussions get side-tracked.

Event organizer Joyce Ikpaahindi (left) with 2015 YALI Fellows Fatu Ogwuche and Benjamin Dankaka (Courtesy of Joyce Ikpaahindi)

Joyce Ikpaahindi, a YALI Network member in Nigeria, saw the need to develop in her community a stronger sense of how to engage effectively in public service to bring about change. She designed an event around the YALI Network Online Course "Strengthening Public Sector Service."

"To set up my event," Ikpaahindi said, "I first needed to find a suitable space to accommodate 21 people. My department at the Federal Ministry of Works was willing to provide the space and equipment needed to host the event."

Ikpaahindi also enlisted the support of two 2015 Mandela Washington Fellows, Fatu Ogwuche and Benjamin Dankaka, who shared their experiences on the Fellowship program and also their leadership experience in the Nigerian public sector. "Real-life examples and experiences shared by the Fellows proved to be quite popular with the participants," she said. "A good #YALILearns event should be as practical, engaging and hands-on as possible."

Both Ikpaahindi and Bonsu created their events by combining a relevant YALI Network online course with additional discussions and presentations from community leaders. The particulars of the program are up to you, since you know your community best — as long as you bring people together, share ideas and take away a resolve to create positive change.

If you want to hold a #YALILearns event of your own, look at the #YALILearns page to learn more about how to facilitate your event and choose a topic that will most benefit your audience. A local partner such as a university or civic group can be useful in finding a venue for your event and helping you get the word out.

During your event, make sure to take pictures, and then let us know how it went at the #YALILearns feedback page so that we can share your success with the Network.

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# YALI Voices Podcast: After being compared to Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, what's your next career move?

(Courtesy of Raindolf Owusu)

In 2012, a 22-year-old Ghanaian computer science student named Raindolf Owusu introduced African internet users to the Anansi Browser. It is considered Africa's first web browser and was designed to help users with unreliable internet connections stay connected as well as use games and a web camera that can operate offline.

For his creation, he has been dubbed "the Mark Zuckerberg of Accra" by Forbes Africa magazine. But as he tells the State Department's Macon Phillips in a YALI Voices podcast, as successful and as celebrated as the browser has been been, he lives in a country where many people can't use it because they aren't connected to the internet.

"Building a big web browser … will give you accolades and everything else, but that's something my mother cannot use or my grandmother in the village cannot use," he said.

As founder and CEO of the software company Oasis WebSoft, Owusu wants to create products that would be more relevant to his community. For example, in Ghana, like other African countries, mobile phones are relatively cheap and nearly everyone has one.

Where is he taking his talent now and what are his future plans as a young leader? Listen to the audio above to find out.

*Don't have access to Sound Cloud?  Read a transcript of the podcast below:*

"YALI Voices Podcast: Raindolf Owusu"
[MUSIC PLAYING]

♪ Yes we can. Sure we can. ♪

♪ Change the World. ♪

MACON PHILLIPS: Welcome Young African Leaders. This is the YALI Voices Podcast – a place to share some of the best stories from the Young African Leaders Initiative Network. My name is Macon Phillips, and I'm really glad you've joined us today. Don't forget to subscribe to this podcast. Just visit YALI.state.gov to stay up to date on all things YALI.

I recently had the chance to sit down with Raindolf Owusu. As the creator of Africa's first web browser, he's already an accomplished software developer and entrepreneur in Ghana. He's the founder and CEO of Oasis WebSoft, a software company, partially focused on creating mobile phone applications to help diagnose and address healthcare issues for Africans.

Raindolf had a lot of really valuable insight on the future of technology in Africa and what it takes to be a modern leader. It's really no wonder he's been called the "Mark Zuckerberg of Africa." So I hope you enjoy this interview as much as I did. We're going to cut now to my conversation with Raindolf Owusu.

Raindolf, it's great to have you here. Thanks for joining us.

RAINDOLF OWUSU: Thank you so much, and great to have you for this interview. Thank you.

MR. PHILLIPS: I know you've had a pretty great career so far. It's still early on in your career.

MR. OWUSU: Yep.

MR. PHILLIPS: But looking forward to hearing a little bit about that, certainly your perspective on technology in Africa –

MR. OWUSU: Yep.

MR. PHILLIPS: – and where you think things are going. But let's try to take it back a little bit. You've made your career in large part on the internet –

MR. OWUSU: Yes.

MR. PHILLIPS: – and sort of doing all of that. What was the first time you ever touched a computer?

MR. OWUSU: Yeah, so my dad got us a computer when I was about 10 years old. He bought it for my older siblings. So we, the younger ones, weren't allowed to touch it. So I have five other siblings. So late at night when they sleep, I just jump on the computer and see what's happening. And one night, I ended up deleting everything on the computer because I needed some space. And I got the beating of my life because at first they didn't know I touched the computer, and now they got to know I deleted everything. So that was pretty much my experience with computers.

MR. PHILLIPS: [LAUGHING] That's not a really auspicious beginning, man.

MR. OWUSU: Yeah. But that got me interested in computers because I realized it was such a big device then, somewhere in 2001 or 2002, and, you know, it did so many different things. I could play games with the computer. I could use Microsoft Word and things like that. And, over time, it gave me a lot to think about.

MR. PHILLIPS: So when you were in secondary school, when you look back on yourself as a student, were you always sort of tracking towards the computer nerd programmer, spending all your free time on that, or was it something that you were aware of but kind of came back to as you developed your own career?

MR. OWUSU: No, it has always been there. I had interest in computers. I remember when I was about 13-14. I used to be called "the computer man" in the neighborhood because I knew so much about computers, and most of them were self-taught because I'm always on the internet and finding new things. So during secondary school, I was a visual arts student instead of business. I had a lot of interest in business. So I wasn't so much interested in schoolwork. So I spent most of my time at the internet café.

MR. PHILLIPS: Well, there's, though, a certain school of thought – I think Steve Jobs from Apple would be probably the most well-known example of this – that the sort of intersection of liberal arts or visual arts and engineering is exactly where you want to be if you are creating consumer products. [CROSSTALK] So maybe as you think about your own career, what, if any, was the influence from that time spent studying visual arts?

MR. OWUSU: Oh, I – even now, I'm happy I did visual arts because now I'm building products – I am building products that I want people to interact with, easy to use. It should be visually appealing because I get to work with colors, I get to work with building software, mobile applications. And all these things have to do with design. So, yeah. They always intersect. Visual arts is a pretty much [INAUDIBLE] technology.

MR. PHILLIPS: So, a lot of people that I talk to have, you know, this interest in entrepreneurship, and they have this interest in starting a business and that sort of thing. And you're someone who's done that.

MR. OWUSU: Yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: Successfully, right?

MR. OWUSU: Yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: So let's start with where you just talked about, your time in school, your visual arts school, and you're not really going to class as much –

MR. OWUSU: Yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: – because you're not as engaged.

MR. OWUSU: Yep.

MR. PHILLIPS: How did you go from there to actually taking the plunge to start a business? Walk us through the steps it takes to go from being a student, maybe not even a super motivated student, to an entrepreneur.

MR. OWUSU: Yeah, it's – I think I had [INAUDIBLE] when I got to the university because I did computer science at Methodist University. So I got to the university and my first day, I enjoyed

programming. I was programming and it was very fun. But later on, I realized the schoolwork was becoming so much. And there was a lot happening outside Ghana. So, just like, you hear of a 16-year-old kid who built an app and it's being purchased by Yahoo for $13 million. And this is a simple app that I could design.

So, the first thing I did was to start – at first it wasn't a company in my head. I was just building a product that I would let people utilize. So I was building products, and later on, over time, I started reading more about this whole technology, and I realized it's actually a business. You have to read more than just technology. You have to actually set up a company. You have to work with people.

So it didn't just happen overnight. I failed a lot actually. My first product became well-known, but to me became a failure. That's called Anansi Web Browser. That is to date being claimed as Africa's first web browser. So I built a web browser because I wanted to show the world Africa could build technology, because anybody who thinks of Africa thinks of an agricultural nation where we are producing oil or we are producing minerals and things like that. But I pretty much wanted to show the world technology is also [CROSSTALK].

MR. PHILLIPS: You wanted to show the world and then you went up and built Africa's first web browser. Why do you think it's a failure?

MR. OWUSU: Pretty much because I didn't customize it for it to be useful in my environment. And that was one learning step I took after building that. So after building the web browser, I decided to build things that would work really well in Africa. So, to me personally, but I believe it gave a lot of people inspiration that if Raindolf also could build a web browser. So personally, I think that is my personal feeling, but overall, looking at me building a web browser in 2011, it was such a big accomplishment, so.

MR. PHILLIPS: So then where did that take you? What did you learn from that in terms of your next step?

MR. OWUSU: So my next step was to look into the market, realize there was a high penetration rate of mobile devices. So everybody had a smartphone because android phones are very cheap. So they had smartphones but they didn't really know it was a smartphone. So I'm like, "Hey, how can we leverage on that and built people the products they want to have?" So we built a product like Bisa, where – Bisa, it means "ask" in Twi. Twi is our local dialect in Ghana. And what we are doing is we are connecting people from home to doctors. So when you have your mobile up and you are a young person and you are seeing some symptoms around your private parts – because we live in a very conservative society, people are scared to go to doctors. So we are giving you a chance to use your phone to take a screenshot and anonymously send it to a doctor and he will get back to you with feedback and let you know you need to see a doctor as soon as possible because this looks like that or you have to do this in order to get rid of that. So we were connecting the public to doctors. And this is very relevant to the community than building a big web browser where it will give you accolade and everything else, but that's something my mother cannot use or my grandmother in the village cannot use.

MR. PHILLIPS: It's so interesting to hear about that use case, because one of the things that I run into when we are talking about the digital aspect of YALI, the online aspect of YALI, is this sense of

the digital divide.

MR. OWUSU: Yep.

MR. PHILLIPS: The fact that there isn't internet everywhere here, and in fact, there's not internet in a lot of places at all, and on top of that, there is sort of a digital illiteracy.

MR. OWUSU: Yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: But it would seem to me that this product that you are rolling out, which is trying to extend health care to at-risk, disconnected regions would almost by definition be targeted at people who –

MR. OWUSU: Yep.

MR. PHILLIPS: – aren't familiar with the internet, aren't necessarily connected with the internet.

MR. OWUSU: Yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: So, how do you square that circle? How do you reconcile the fact that you're in a region where connectivity is tough, and sometimes using computers or smartphones or connected devices can be a little bit difficult with this need to make sure that these services are utilized?

MR. OWUSU: Yeah, so I always attribute the kind of work I do to the fact that I'm actually on ground zero. I'm where everything is happening. So when I'm rolling out a technology like Bisa, I have to think about every part of Ghana. I don't just need to think about Accra. Accra is just a small piece of the whole Ghana. So there's somebody who is in Sirigu in maybe the northern region where the only time he or she gets close to technology is the radio or maybe a Nokia [INAUDIBLE] that does not have app features or anything. So when we are building a product, we build high-end for people like myself, who have been to school, literate people. And we build something using like an IVR, an Interactive Voice Response, where – with any mobile device. It doesn't have to be smart. You just dial a short code and someone will talk to you in a local language, a response system.

So, we are building technology for high-end people, and we build a stripped-down version for people without access to that IT infrastructure. And we get to do that because here on the ground, we know how things like this work in different parts of the country.

MR. PHILLIPS: And so, as someone who's studying this closely and has a business that really depends on it, give me the forecast to where you think Ghana is going in terms of technology, and to the extent you can, Africa generally. As we think about our own efforts, our nonprofits we want to start, our businesses we want to start, how is technology changing Africa?

MR. OWUSU: Yeah, that's a good question. I think technology at first was something most people were scared about, if you read the history of technology in Africa, where people had big computers in their offices and they never used it. But now we've seen a change, and mobile phones have led that revolution. At one point, we had so many mobile phones in Africa than even telephone devices in the U.S. or something, right? And that stems to how mobile phones revolutionized this bit.

And one thing people are getting to understand in all sectors in business in maybe Ghana is

technology is a backbone. Healthcare needs technology. Entertainment needs technology – even education. So I think in the next five years, you'd see distance learning or e-learning taking shape in schools. And once that this becomes a norm, it will be something everybody would have to accept in any industry, whether agriculture, because now we have small farmers that are using SMSs to receive weather forecasts. So technology is actually taking shape step by step, but then it will take a while and a lot of education.

So in Ghana perspective, I think the next five years would see a lot of innovations. Some of us are spearheading it in healthcare. I want to see other people doing it in agriculture, people doing it in education, and so on and so forth.

MR. PHILLIPS: Yeah. That's interesting though because I haven't heard someone answer it with the sort of first point, and I think I agree, perhaps the most fundamental point being its impact on education.

MR. OWUSU: Yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: Because, you know, all these other things build on having a literate, knowledgeable workforce. When we talk about civic engagement, people have to understand the world. When we talk about new economies, people have to have these skills. And when you think about the current state of education systems in a lot of countries in Africa, it's not good, the idea that you could actually bring in these online courses and bring in tech-driven curricula could have a profound impact on where things are heading. So it's a really interesting point you make.

MR. OWUSU: Yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: So where are you heading? What's your next business? You know, you've already started some successful businesses, and it seems like the latest one is doing really great work around healthcare.

MR. OWUSU: Yep.

MR. PHILLIPS: What do you daydream about? What do you want to work on moving forward?

MR. OWUSU: Oh, so I think I've fallen in love with the healthcare sector, and – because besides getting very popular, it's becoming very impactful in Ghana. I'm looking at ways to enter into other markets, other West African markets like Côte d'Ivoire, where Bisa will not only support Ghanaian languages, but will also support French and maybe expand to other African countries.

So the next focus – and a few days ago, we had a small forum with my team where we are discussing how we can move the technology into other areas of the whole healthcare system, you know, because recordkeeping is very important. But we don't take it seriously in this part of the world, where you go to a hospital and you are given your folder to take home. That is very terrible; you can just lose the folder. You know, we need like a digital cloud system that can house all your information, so no matter who the doctor is, once you come to his room, he looks at your ID, he can just pull up your healthcare information. And it will help for them to continuously understand your ailment or anything else.

MR. PHILLIPS: A few other questions I have for you. You mentioned earlier that you were at a forum

for your team.

MR. OWUSU: Yep.

MR. PHILLIPS: And I'm curious. As someone who's gone from being, it sounds like, the younger kid in the family, right?

MR. OWUSU: Yep. [LAUGHING] Yeah, I'm the youngest male, yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: Of how many?

MR. OWUSU: I have two other brothers and three other sisters.

MR. PHILLIPS: Alright, three other sisters?

MR. OWUSU: Yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: Oh my goodness. You're well-loved growing up, I'm sure, right?

MR. OWUSU: [LAUGHING]

MR. PHILLIPS: So, you're one of the young kids in the family, and now you're running an organization.

MR. OWUSU: Yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: What have you learned along the way about management and about leadership? I mean, what do you think has made you effective at leading other people?

MR. OWUSU: Yeah, I think it's because I don't see myself as a leader in the team, but as a team player. And I'm going to explain that. Because I'm a trained software engineer. If I come up with a project and we are working on it, I actually need a software development team. So I get to write the code with them. So when you are working with a team and they know they are part of the process, they don't really feel left out.

So that has attributed to the success of our project, you know, because I don't become your typical leader where I tell you to do this or do that, but I actually work with you, so if you have any problem, you can easily walk up to – and even my office is an open office, so you can easily walk up to my table and say, "Hey, I'm having problems with this code," or "I'm trying to market this to this client and I'm not getting it." So I think being a team player is very important. And the fact that I continuously mentor them. Any time they have any challenge, they easily walk up to me and I'm open to listening and offer my advice. And I even tell them to explore, you know, other avenues of solving problems. You know, it's not just your work at the office, but then, hey, we live in a very diverse society. So if there are problems you see, you can bring it on board and let's see how best we can all work together. So I think being a team player has actually contributed to my success as a leader.

MR. PHILLIPS: Yeah. Are there things you do every day or routines you do every week that you feel like have made you a more effective leader or more effective person in terms of your goals?

MR. OWUSU: I think reading. I read 30 minutes every day, whether it is news articles or a book. And I like to read things outside what I'm doing. So you won't find me reading a book about technology. You'd find me reading a book about a politician or a religion or something.

MR. PHILLIPS: What's on your Kindle or on your bookshelf these days? What would you recommend to people?

MR. OWUSU: I think How to Influence People. It's an interesting book. And I read a lot of autobiographies. So these days I'm reading about Kenneth Kaunda. He used to be the President of [INAUDIBLE] – Zambia. I read a lot of autobiographies.

MR. PHILLIPS: And what would you say – if you had to sum up your reading so far on him – has been the sort of takeaway?

MR. OWUSU: I think he had to make hard choices and he was – you know, religion in Africa is very big, so he was juggling between how to become a Christian and how to make hard choices when it came to dealing with rebels and things like that. Should he arm the soldiers to go and fight the rebels? Or he should be relaxed for the rebels to take over certain regions? So, yeah, I think – [LAUGHING].

MR. PHILLIPS: Hard choices.

MR. OWUSU: Yeah, hard choices. And being a leader is all about making hard choices, so you should always be ready for that.

MR. PHILLIPS: So, the last one is more turning the tables because we've been asking you a lot of questions. If you could ask Barack Obama a question, what would you want to know?

MR. OWUSU: Ahh [LAUGHING] If Obama is sitting – President Barack Obama is sitting here, I want to know what's next after the Presidency and if he would be more involved in issues in Africa. So I would want to know what his plan for Africa would be after 2016.

MR. PHILLIPS: I don't know the answer to that, but my hunch is it will involve something having to do with Africa. I was speaking earlier about this. I got a different question and what is very clear to me is that Africa is very much in the President's heart and so are young leaders.

So, for everyone out there on the YALI Network listening to this, I think there's – it's hard to imagine a future where Barack Obama is not somehow involved with these issues and on this continent. So, the future is bright, not least of which because of the young leaders who are tuning in right now. And we want to thank all of you for joining us today on the YALI Podcast. Raindolf, I've really enjoyed our conversation.

MR. OWUSU: Thank you, Macon.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thanks for making time.

MR. OWUSU: You're welcome.

MR. PHILLIPS: Have a great day.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

MR. PHILLIPS: What's really great about Raindolf is how committed he is to mentoring. He sees the value in sharing ideas and moving everyone forward. I also love how he practices the idea of failing forward. It's the notion that even when things don't work out for you, you can still learn from the experience and immediately apply those lessons to your next project.

So I want to thank Raindolf for sitting down and sharing his story with us. If you'd like to get more info about Raindolf, check out OasisWebSoft.com where you can connect with him and get more information on his projects.

Thanks so much for listening and make sure to subscribe so you don't miss any of the upcoming interviews with other young African leaders. Join the YALI Network at YALI.state.gov and be part of something bigger.

Our theme music is "E Go Happen" by Grace Jerry, produced by the Presidential Precinct. The YALI Voices Podcast is brought to you by the U.S. Department of State, and is part of the Young African Leaders Initiative, which is funded by the U.S. government.

Thanks everyone.

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# Climate change: Everyone has a role

Melanie Nakagawa teaches YALI Network's online lesson "The Science of Climate Change." (Courtesy photo)

You asked, we answered. As part of our #YALIGoesGreen initiative, we invited YALI Network Green Champions to ask questions of Melanie Nakagawa, deputy assistant secretary of state for energy transformation in the Bureau of Energy Resources and the instructor for the first lesson of Understanding Climate Change.

***How do we get youth and women involved in solving climate change? (Kenya)***

When it comes to tackling climate change, everyone needs to be brought to the table, especially women and young people.

Women have invaluable knowledge of community and social norms that can be harnessed into climate action. Studies on women and disaster show that when women are engaged as decisionmakers in resilience and disaster plans, they are better able to adapt and manage the impacts.

One way to get women more engaged is by creating spaces and opportunities targeted toward

women — for instance, after a solar-panel technician workshop in Kenya attracted only men, the USAID clean energy program sponsored a women-only workshop to ensure women could gain skills needed to advance in the renewable energy field and to train other women.

And for youth, they are one of the largest demographics in the world — more than 1 billion worldwide! There is so much strength and innovation that can come from this group. A big part of getting youth involved in solving climate change is starting from a solid knowledge foundation. Society needs citizens who understand the climate system and know how to apply that knowledge in their careers and in their engagement as active members of their communities.

We know that empowering women and youth benefits everyone. It increases the number of supporters and active participants in the climate change dialogue, and offers diverse perspectives and solutions. When everyone comes together, with a united purpose to solve this problem, we can surely make a difference.

***Since climate change has become a global problem, what can ordinary citizens do to help mitigate it? (Tanzania)***

We know that this problem is so vast that no one country can solve it alone. No country too small can sit on the sidelines either. Everyone must do their part. There are many ways to help reduce your own personal carbon footprint, but there are also ways to get involved at the community level. You can support efforts to "green" your neighborhood, get involved in an environmental program, and let your elected representatives know you support action on climate change. If we think globally and act locally, we'll have a fighting chance at staying below 2 degrees.

***What suggestions do you have to help reduce carbon emissions within the home and workplace? (Kenya)***

Just like real footprints, everyone's carbon footprint is a little different. Here is a list of options that will help curb your contribution to greenhouse gas emissions. See how many you do!

When you run errands or travel …

- Walk or ride a bike.
- Take public transportation.
- Organize errands into one trip.
- When driving, accelerate gradually and drive at lower speeds.
- Drive less, particularly on days with unhealthy air.
- Maintain your vehicle and keep your tires properly inflated.
- If there is an emissions check program in your area, get your car checked.
- Travel light and avoid weighing down your vehicle.
- Try not to idle your vehicle more than 30 seconds.
- If you are buying a new car, go for the most efficient, lowest-polluting vehicle.

When you are at home …

- Turn the lights off when you leave a room.
- Replace energy-hungry incandescent lights with energy-saving CFLs or LEDs.

- If alternative energy sources such as solar or wind are available, use them.
- Limit use of heaters and air conditioners.
- Install low-flow shower heads.
- Recycle paper, plastic and organic materials.
- Use nonpolluting stoves. Avoid using kerosene to cook, heat or provide light.
- Wash laundry in cold water and line dry.
- Buy energy-efficient appliances.
- Use washable dishes, utensils and napkins rather than disposable plastic dinnerware.
- Choose products made from recycled materials or sustainable sources such as bamboo, hemp and coconut fiber.
- Use durable, reusable shopping bags, not disposable plastic bags.
- Paint with a brush instead of a sprayer.
- Store all solvents in airtight containers.
- Use an electric or push lawn mower, and a rake instead of a leaf blower.
- Eliminate use of toxic chemicals at home; opt for natural substitutes.
- Plant a tree to help purify the air.

When you are at work …

- Use natural light during the day.
- Keep the thermostat at energy-saving settings.
- Work from home if possible.
- If you work in an office, start a recycling program. Print and photocopy on both sides of paper, and only print when necessary.
- Turn off office equipment (e.g., computers, printers and fax machines) after hours.

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# Countering pollution in the air

Melanie Nakagawa teaches YALI Network's online lesson "The Science of Climate Change." (Courtesy photo)

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***What can we do to reduce the harmful gases which are already in nature? (Burkina Faso)***

One great way to pull CO2 out of the atmosphere is by conserving and rebuilding forests. Forests have the potential to absorb up to 30 percent of CO2 from humans by 2030. Proper stewardship of our forests also pays back economic dividends like soil enrichment for agriculture, improvement of

irrigation and more.
So plant a locally sustainable tree! It sometimes really can be that easy.

***In the lesson you taught, we learnt how the depletion of ozone layer is orchestrated by harmful gases such as CO2 and CH4. In Nigeria we are clamoring for more industries to be established to scale up the manufacturing processes, thereby creating employment opportunities. How do we reconcile the proliferation of industries, the harmful gases emitted from these industries and the effects on the climate? (Nigeria)***

In the United States, American companies are signing up to make green pledges. Protecting the environment does not have to come at the cost of economic growth; in fact, many business leaders are viewing climate change as a market opportunity.

There are many ways to "green" a business, such as

- Committing to efficient production and supply chains.
- Using electricity from renewable sources to power buildings.
- Reducing waste to landfills, thereby lessening the amount of methane released to the atmosphere.

Very often, these green business decisions end up saving money, which is a win-win for all stakeholders involved.

***How can we get industries that emit a lot of carbon to use alternative forms of energy? And how sustainable are these renewable energy sources compared to the conventional ones? (Nigeria)***

The International Energy Agency (IEA) estimates that the manufacturing industry can improve its energy efficiency by an impressive 18 to 26 percent, while reducing the sector's carbon dioxide emissions by 19 to 32 percent, by adopting proven technology and best practices. This is important, because industrial energy demand is projected to increase by as much as 44 percent over the next 20 years, particularly in emerging and developing countries.

Through greater use of cleaner, more efficient energy and production technologies we can continue to reduce pollution, improve public health and the environment, while also supplying the reliable, affordable power needed for economic growth, including in energy-intensive industries such as cement, chemicals, and metals production.

These factors helped drive global clean energy investment to an all-time high in 2015 of $329 billion, according to BNEF. Emerging economies like China, India and Brazil invested more in renewable technologies last year than the developed world. These facts suggest that renewable energy is going to be sustainable in the long term.

***Are there other effective renewable energy sources that could be used in the future besides biofuels? (Nigeria)***

Energy efficiency is a domestically produced, zero-emissions source of energy that can increase energy security while advancing economic development. In the past, energy efficiency was associated with sacrifice in comfort or profit but, with technological advances such as smarter and more efficient appliances and lighting, transportation and even fuel extraction and generation, that

is no longer the case.

According to the IEA, realizing the full potential of energy efficiency could shave 28 percent off of global energy demand by 2050 and account for half of energy-related emissions reductions.